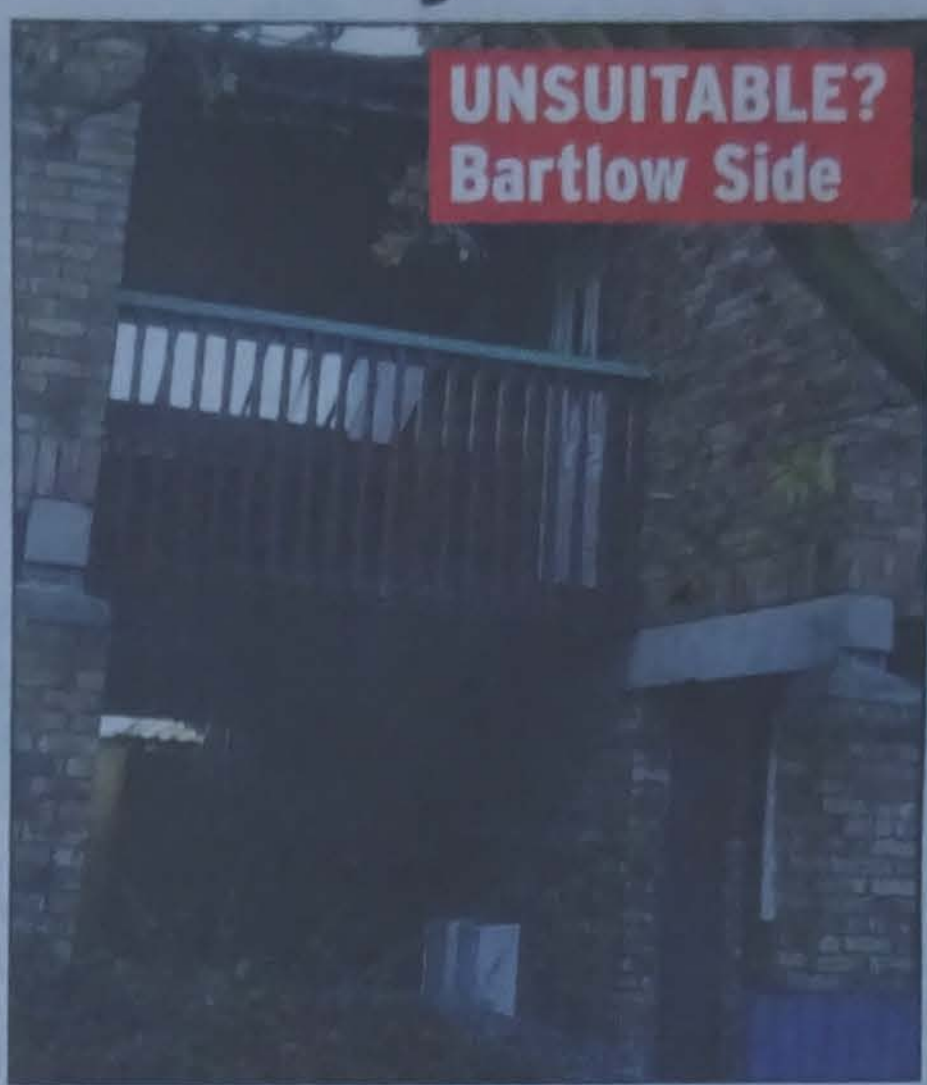
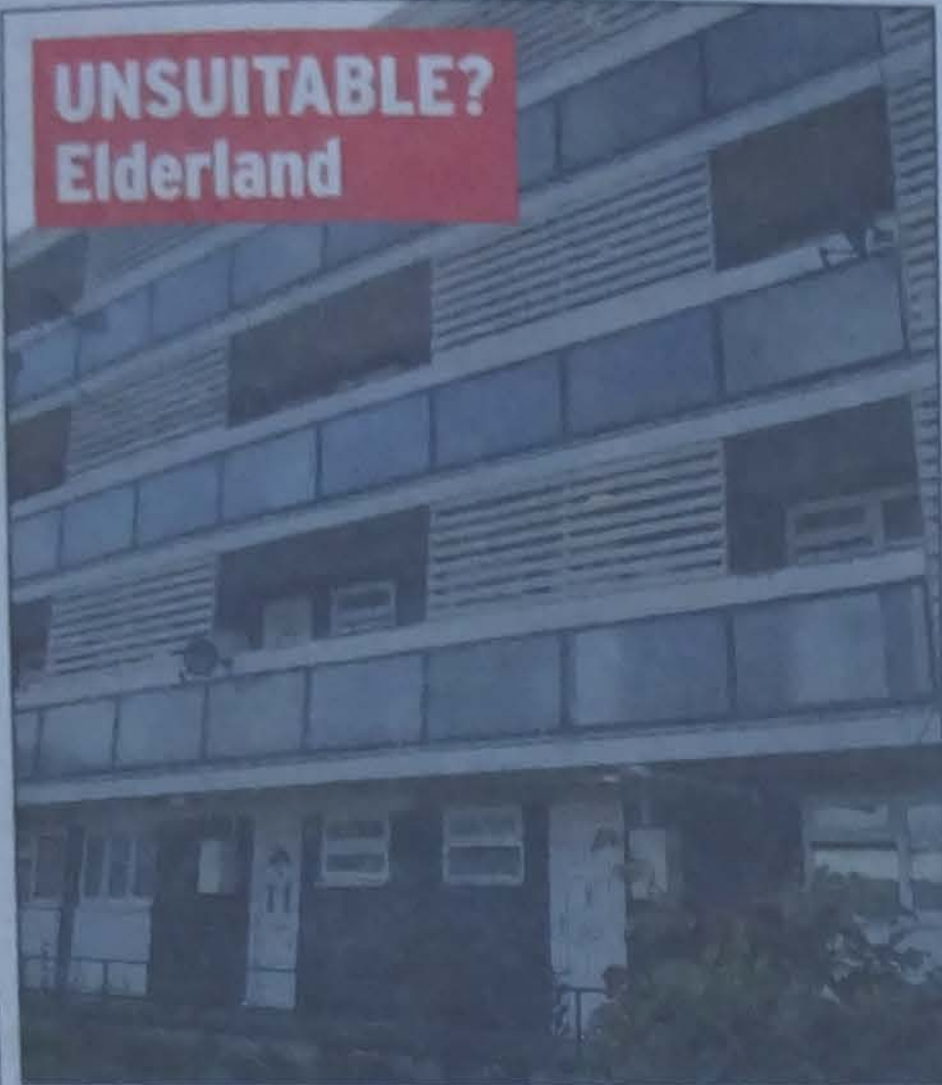


Families facing eviction 'can't face living in flats'



■ Bricks and mortar – three of the properties offered to travellers as alternative homes to their illegal Dale Farm pitches

Pictures: LUAN MARSHALL BA37173

The council properties being offered to travellers

THESE are some of the council homes which have been offered to travellers facing eviction from Dale Farm.

The three addresses in Elderland, Laindon, Southwell Link, on the Five Links estate, and Bartlow Side, in Felmores, were revealed in court yesterday.

Four travellers from the huge illegal site in Crays Hill are appealing the offers, saying it goes against their nomadic culture to live in bricks and mortar.

Southend County Court heard claims it could lead to the death of one of them, John Sheridan, 33, who suffers diabetes, depression, mild learning disabilities, and survives on income support and incapacity benefits.

Alex Offer, representing the travellers, said an expert witness, consultant psychiatrist Dr Mark Slater, had written a report stating it would amount to a "death sentence" if Mr Sheridan had to move from Dale Farm into the third-storey one-bedroom flat in Elderland.

In a separate report on Mr Sheridan's estranged wife Barbara O'Brien, 29, Dr Slater

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concluded if she moved into the property in Southwell Link, she would experience "significant depression and anxiety" and could struggle to properly care for her children. The court heard the couple live on separate pitches at Dale Farm, but Mrs O'Brien cares for Mr Sheridan, so they need to be neighbours.

Mr Offer detailed how after Mr Sheridan lost both his parents in the Nineties, he would drink up to a bottle of whisky a day – once falling into a diabetic coma – and had had suicidal thoughts.

Dr Slater suggested life in the flat would leave him in an "isolated environment, alien to his culture" and at high risk of returning to the bottle.

Mr Offer added the fact the separated couple's council homes would be more than a mile apart, and Mrs O'Brien does not drive, would mean she would no longer be able to care for Mr Sheridan.

He branded both properties unsuitable and said they would result in psychiatric harm.

He added: "If there was ever a

case of an offer of bricks and mortar being unsuitable, then it is John Sheridan's."

Mr Offer told the court the council had refused his appeal against the offer, writing to him to suggest he contacted his GP if he was suffering depression.

He added the basis of the council's offer was that there were no traveller pitches available.

But Mr Offer argued a local authority has a legal duty to seek to make provision for vulnerable homeless travellers.

He said they could not reject an appeal against the housing offer simply because no alternatives existed at that time.

The case, which also concerns appeals by John, 77, and Mary Flynn, 70, who were offered the flat at Bartlow End, continues.

“If there was ever a case of an offer of bricks and mortar being unsuitable it is John Sheridan's

COURT STOPS DETAILS OF LATEST PITCH TALKS BEING SHARED

A COURT order was imposed preventing details of a series of confidential meetings about traveller site provision from being heard in court.

Yesterday's hearing had been adjourned from mid-September at the request of travellers' barrister Alex Offer, after he learned from Echo exclusive reports that the secret meetings had been taking place between Basildon Council, the Homes and Communities Agency, other bodies and traveller representatives.

The closed-door talks had considered alternative sites for Dale Farm travellers across Essex and in Basildon.

Mr Offer argued that the fact there was a possibility of

sites becoming available should have some bearing on the case, because the council house offers had been made on the grounds no other caravan pitches were available.

Several witnesses who took part in the talks had made witness statements and attended court to give evidence yesterday.

However, Galina Ward, representing the council, argued their statements were irrelevant because the council housing department had to make its decision based on the situation at the time, when there had been no other sites.

His honour judge Peter Dedman agreed, and released the witnesses from court.

Police hunt robbers who battered a shop worker

TWO shop workers were left battered and bruised after they were attacked by armed raiders.

The two male staff were working at the Bottle and Basket off-licence, in Carron Lane, South

Ockendon, when the trio burst in.

They punched one of the men in the face, leaving him with minor injuries, before hitting the other one over the head.

The second worker had to be

taken to hospital for treatment to the resulting head injury.

The raiders fled with cigarettes and cash.

Detectives are investigating the robbery and are appealing for wit-

nesses. One robber wore a yellow hooded top while his two male accomplices wore black hooded tops and scarves over their faces.

Police believe they may have run off in the direction of

Humber Avenue. Witnesses to the robbery, which happened just after 5.30pm on Tuesday, can contact detectives at South Ockendon CID on 0300 333444.